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"Last week in London, I attended the shareholder meeting for Rio Tinto, one of the backers of a massive proposed copper and gold mine above <a href=\"http:\/\/www.savebiogems.org\/bristolbay\/\" target=\"_hplink\">Bristol Bay, Alaska<\/a>. \n\nRepresentatives of communities from around the world gathered at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Center near Westminster Abbey to question the company's board about a long list of mining ventures gone bad for the people around them. Stories of contaminated waters and disrupted lives. Calls for compensation and remediation.\n\n<a href=\"http:\/\/www.nrdc.org\/\" target=\"_hplink\">The Natural Resources Defense Council <\/a>was there along with Kimberly Williams, Executive Director of Nunumta Aulukestai (\"Keepers of the Land\" in Yupik), an association of nine village corporations in south west Alaska and one of the leaders of the coalition in the Bristol Bay region of Alaska opposed to the Pebble Mine. \n\nOur goal is to protect Bristol Bay from the devastation that so often accompanies large-scale mining. \n\nOur purpose in London was to urge Rio Tinto's management and board to end the company's participation in the Pebble Mine project -- just as Mitsubishi Corporation had ended is participation in February -- because we consider it to be, from an environmental and an economic perspective, one of the worst proposals for development anywhere in the world today.\n\nPicture a two-mile-wide open-pit mine gouged into the landscape at the headwaters of the Bristol Bay watershed. The mine would produce an estimated 10 billion tons of contaminated waste, contained in theory forever behind massive dams, some larger than the Three Gorges Dam in China. All in an active earthquake zone.\n\nWater would have to be drained away from the site in perpetuity -- called dewatering -- to prevent copper and acid mine drainage into the surrounding streams where salmon, by the trillions, have spawned for thousands of years. As Robert Redford wrote in a full-page ad in today's<em> New York Times<\/em>, \"it's an environmental tragedy waiting to happen.\"\n\nAnd it would be an economic disaster for the region. Bristol Bay is home to the most productive wild salmon fishery in the world, generating about $450 million each year in revenue and thousands of jobs for the region's residents. This is the economic engine that has sustained the region's people, its communities, and its wildlife for generations, and Pebble Mine threatens to poison it\n\nNunumta Alukestai is leading overwhelming opposition in Alaska, including over 80 percent of the region's residents. A uniquely broad-based coalition of Alaskan Natives, commercial and recreational fishermen, hunters, conservationists, and business have formed to fight the mine.\n\nNRDC has been working with all of them to encourage the major corporate Pebble Mine partners to abandon the project, including, over the past year, delivering to the companies' management almost 300,000 petitions in opposition. We met with the head of Mitsubishi Corporation's mining division at their headquarters in Tokyo last June, where NRDC is well known. \n\nA decade ago we led a successful international campaign against a massive industrial salt plant that Mitsubishi, together with the Mexican government, had proposed to build in the heart of a gray whale nursery in<a href=\"http:\/\/www.savebiogems.org\/baja\/\" target=\"_hplink\"> Baja California<\/a>. In 2000, after a five-year battle, the plan was abandoned.\n\nTwo months ago, after an assessment of its global copper holdings, Mitsubishi ended its participation in the Pebble Mine. We have asked Rio Tinto and Anglo American to do the same. \n\nLast week, before the Rio Tinto shareholder meeting, Kimberly and I, along with Jason Metrokin (the CEO of the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, the largest private landowner in the Bristol Bay region), former Alaska State Senate President Rick Halford, and past President of the Igiugig Village Tribal Council Lydia Olympic, met with Rio Tinto CEO Tom Albanese and his team in Rio Tinto's offices to explain the region's opposition.\n\nOn the day of the shareholder meeting a full-page ad in the London Financial Times appeared, funded by NRDC and co-signed by eight coalition members, including Nunumta. \"Rio Tinto: Talk is cheap,\" the headline read, then cautioning Rio Tinto's shareholders to \"watch what Rio Tinto does, not what it says.\" The ad urged the company to follow Mitsubishi Corporation's example and withdraw from the Pebble project.\n\nAt the shareholder meeting itself, after Kimberly and I addressed the company's board, both Rio Tinto's Albanese and the Board Chairman Jan du Plessis thanked us for coming, acknowledged the seriousness of our concerns, and invited further dialogue. No surprises there. \n\nBut I couldn't forget something else Chairman du Plessis said. After several speakers had delivered their reports of toxic waters and trashed cultural traditions, he said, \"I want to say that a company the size of Rio Tinto will not be perfect. We will make

mistakes.\"\n\nHe's right of course. Mining is, by definition, a dangerous business, and companies with operations as vast as Rio Tinto's will make mistakes. And for that reason, inevitably, an operation like Pebble Mine, in a location like the headwaters of the Bristol Bay watershed, is a prescription for failure, and its consequences would be devastating.\n\nThe Pebble Mine must be <a href=\"http:\/\/www.stoppebble.org\" target=\"_hplink\">stopped<\/a>.\n"},"comment_glamorous":{"comments_amount":"0"}}});